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## A SOUTHERNER ON THE NEGRO QUESTION.

BY THOMAS NELSON PAGE, AUTHOR OF "MARSE CHAN," "MEH LADY," "ELSKET," ETC.

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A FEW months ago that Englishman who is perhaps the closest student among his people of our American institutions, Professor James Bryce, gave in *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* his views as to the Negro Problem.\* He declared that the most serious problem which the people and the government of the United States have to deal with is the position of the colored population of the South.

No Southerner will gainsay Professor Bryce's declaration as to the gravity of this matter. It is true that a year ago—when the Lodge Bill was pending, and when the ratio of relative increase of the white and negro races was not yet known—the peril appeared to at least one part of the country more immediate than it has done since "the Force Bill," as the South termed it, failed and since the results of the census have become known. But the problem is serious enough now, and is the gravest one which we face to-day. What was thought of it at that time may be gathered from the attitude of the people of the South whilst the Lodge Bill was under discussion. Consideration of all other matters, whatever, practically ceased. The South alone understood what it meant.

Senator Hoar, of Massachusetts, speaking of the South on the floor of the Senate, on the 23d February, 1889, said: "The person hears the sound of my voice this moment who in his lifetime will see fifty million negroes dwelling in those States."

The proposition stated seems to us who know the negro to contain its own argument. We of the South who see them at short range are astonished that Senator Hoar and that great body

\* "Thoughts on the Negro Problem," by Professor James Bryce, *NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW*, December, 1891.

of people whose views he represents do not understand the perils of the situation. At one step more they confront the rest of the Anglo-American people ; for the only thing that stands between the negro race and the people of the North to-day is the people of the South.

The chief difficulty in the solution of the question is to be found in the different views held as to it by the two sections. They do not understand it alike.

Two propositions may be safely affirmed ; one, that there must be a grave error somewhere ; the other, that there must be a right position, and the sooner the American people find it and plant themselves on it, the better for us and for those that come after us ; the better for the negro race as well ; for the future of the negro depends upon the white.

Perhaps no clearer or more authoritative exposition of the views held by the North on this question can be found than that set forth in an address before the Massachusetts Club of Boston on the 22d of February, 1890. The favor with which it was received by the class to whom it was delivered testifies the extent to which the question is misunderstood at the North. After negativing the Southern idea of the question, the speaker declares : “The problem is whether American citizens shall not enjoy equal rights in the choice of their rulers. It is not a question of the negroes’ right to rule. It is simply a question of their right to choose rulers ; and as in reconstruction days they selected more white men for office than men of their own race, they would probably do so now.”

The view which the South takes of this question is that it is a great race question, on the correct solution of which depends not only the present salvation of the South, but the future of the nation. That there exists a race question of some sort must be apparent to every person who passes through the South. Where six millions of people of one color and with a certain history live in contact with ten or twelve millions of another color and with a widely different history there must of necessity be a race question.

The negro began his career as a citizen under heavy disadvantages, his ignorance being only one of them. He has not behaved unnaturally. Fresh from slavery he was enfranchised as a voter, and was drafted into the Union League under carpet-bag officers as an ally, through whom was to be secured the

perpetual ascendancy of "the party of the Union." With the same end in view the whites were disfranchised. It was a great mistake. Since then the real issue at the South has been the race issue. Other issues have arisen from time to time, but this has been the paramount issue.

The result is singularly anomalous. The feeling has not reached the point of personal hostility, at least, on the part of the whites ; but as the older generation which knew the ties between the races in the relation of master and servant passes away the race feeling is perhaps growing intenser. The negro becomes more and more assertive. The white steadily becomes impressed more and more deeply with the conviction that upon the continued domination of his race depends not only the present but the future greatness of this country. He is not left to mere theory as to this. The history of the negro race, unhappily, furnishes an unanswerable argument, that, whatever a sentimental philanthropy may assert, there underlies the whole matter the potent and mysterious principle of race quality. Slavery will not alone account for it. Bondage cannot enthral the mind. In the recorded experience of mankind, slavery alone has not repressed intelligence.

The negro has not progressed, not because he was a slave, but because he does not possess the faculties to raise himself above slavery. He has not yet exhibited the qualities of any race which has advanced civilization or shown capacity to be greatly advanced. What the future may bring forth no man may certainly foretell ; it belongs to prophecy. We can only hope. But the past is fixed.

Where the negro has thriven it has invariably been under the influence and by the assistance of a stronger race. These wanting, he has inevitably and visibly reverted towards the original type.

Since the dawn of history the negro has been in one place or another—in Egypt, in Phœnicia, in Rome, and other countries—brought in contact with civilization. For over two hundred years he has been under the immediate influence of the most potent race of modern, if not of all, times, and within the sweep of the ripest period of the world's history. In New England he has not been a slave for a hundred years. The result there is instructive.

Dr. Henry M. Field is an extensive traveller, a close and wide

observer, an honest recorder, and the friend of the whole human race. He is a member of a Northern family of which New England may be justly proud. Speaking of the negro's condition he says : \*

"Here we are doomed to great disappointment. The black man has every right which has belonged to his white neighbor; not only the natural rights which, according to the Declaration of Independence, belong to every human being—the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; but the right to vote and to have a part in making the laws. He could own his little home, and there sit under his own vine and fig tree, with none to molest or to make him afraid. His children could go to the same common schools and sit on the same benches, and learn the same lessons as white children. With such advantages a race that had natural genius ought to have made great progress in a hundred years. But where are the men that it should have produced to be the leaders of their people? We find not one who has taken rank as a man of action or a man of thought, as a thinker or a writer, as artist or poet, discoverer or inventor. The whole race has remained on a dead level of mediocrity. If any man ever proved himself a friend of the African race it was Theodors Parker, who endured all sorts of persecutions and social ostracism, who faced mobs and was hissed and hooted in public meetings for his bold championship of the rights of the negro race. But rights are one thing and capacity is another. And while he was ready to fight for them, he was very despondent as to their capacity for rising in the scale of civilization. Indeed, he said in so many words, 'In respect to the power of civilization, the African is at the bottom, the American Indian next.' In 1857 he wrote to a friend: 'There are inferior races which have always borne the same ignoble relation to the rest of men and always will. In two generations what a change will be in the condition and character of the Irish in New England. But in twenty generations the negro will stand just where he is now, that is, if he will not have disappeared.'

"That was more than thirty years ago," proceeds Dr. Field. "But to-day I look about me here in Massachusetts, and I see a few colored men. But what are they doing? They work in the fields, they hoe corn, they dig potatoes, the women take in washing. I find colored barbers and white-washers, shoe blacks and chimney sweeps; but I do not know a single man who has grown to be a merchant or a banker, a judge or a lawyer, a member of the Legislature or a justice of the peace, or even a selectman of the town. In all these respects they remain where they were in the days of our fathers. The best friends of the colored race, of whom I am one, must confess that it is disappointing and discouraging to find that with all these opportunities they are little removed from where they were a hundred years ago!"

But suppose there have been a few lawyers and doctors, and even a judge or two, selected rather with a view to recognition of the complexion of their skins than the qualities of their minds, these are the exceptions which prove the rule, and not one has attained a point above mediocrity.

\* "Sunny Skies and Dark Shadows," by Dr. Henry M. Field.

The history of the negro race in Liberia and Hayti has been even more disappointing to the hopes of his friends than elsewhere. In both of these countries a civilization was created for him. Liberia was founded for him by the Caucasian in as high hope as even was this Republic. Christendom gave its assistance and its prayers. How has the negro progressed there? Mr. Charles H. J. Taylor, late U. S. Minister to Liberia, a colored man himself, wrote an account of that country which was published in the *Kansas City Times*, of April 22, 1888. Not a factory, mill, or workshop, of any kind, he says, is to be found there. "They (the government) have no money or currency in circulation of any kind. They have no boats of any character, not even a canoe, the two gun-boats England gave them lying rotten on the beach." . . . . "Look from morn till night you will never see a horse, a mule, a donkey, or a broken-in ox. They have them not. There is not a buggy, a wagon, a cart, a slide, a wheelbarrow in the four counties. The natives carry everything on their heads." The whole picture presented is hopeless.

It is not better in Hayti. For nearly a hundred years the negro has been masquerading in governing Hayti, and a more fantastic mummery never degraded a land. Under negro rule San Domingo, once the queen of the Antilles, has sunk into a state of almost primeval barbarism. We have two recent pictures of Hayti, by Englishmen, both of whom assure us that they have no race antipathy; one James Anthony Froude, the historian, the other Sir Spencer St. John, for years British Resident at Hayti. They both agree. The picture presented in Sir Spencer St. John's work, "The Black Republic," is astounding, revolution succeeding revolution, and massacre succeeding massacre; the country once teeming with wealth, covered with beautiful villas and plantations, and with a considerable foreign commerce, now in a state of decay and ruin, without trade or resources of any kind; peculation and jobbery paramount in all public offices; barbarism substituted for civilization; voodoo worship springing up in place of Christianity, and human flesh oftener than once sold in the market place of Port-au-Prince, the capital. Sir Spencer St. John says that a Spanish colleague once said to him, "If we could return to Hayti fifty years hence, we should find the negresses cooking their bananas on the ruins of these warehouses." On which, he

remarks, "It is more than probable, unless in the meantime influenced by some higher civilization, that this prophecy will come true. The negresses are in fact cooking their bananas amid the ruins of the best houses of the capital."

These examples seem to establish the fact that the negro does not possess the elements of character, the essential qualifications to conduct a government even for himself, and that if reins of government be intrusted to his unaided hands he will fling reason to the winds and drive to ruin.

Were this, however, true only of Liberia and Hayti we might bear it with such philosophic composure as our philanthropy admits of. But the South has had a personal experience of the negro's rule. For eight years a number of the Southern States were partly, and three of them were wholly, given up to the control of the negroes, directed by leaders, at least, of undoubted ability, and sustained by the influence of the entire North. The white was disfranchised. The negro and his chosen leaders were invested with absolute power; the entire weight of government was, under the misapprehension born of the excitement which then reigned, thrown blindly in his favor. Then was the occasion which Mr. Cable selects for his illustration. The negro selected his own rulers. What was the result? Such a riot of folly and extravagance, such a travesty of government as was never witnessed save in those countries in which he had himself furnished the illustration. Carpet-bag rule, with the negro as its facile and ignorant instrument, inaugurated a new system of debauchery and crime.

Space will not admit of a detailed description; but a few facts will be sufficient. A more complete picture will be found in the series of carefully prepared papers, which appeared a year or two since entitled, "Noted Men on the Solid South," to which I refer, and to which I am indebted for much of my material in this branch of the subject.

The Louisiana State Lottery was one offspring of a misrule which proved strong enough to defy for years even the Federal Government.

Soon after Warmouth came into office in Louisiana he stated in his message of January 4, 1868, to his legislature, "Our debt is smaller than that of almost any State in the Union, with a tax roll of \$251,000,000, and a bonded debt that can and will

be reduced to \$6,000,000." Two years later, "the census of 1870 showed the debt of the State to have increased to \$25,021,734, and that of the parishes and municipalities to \$28,065,770. Within a year the State debt was increased over half, and the local indebtedness had doubled. Louisiana, according to the census, stood in the matter of debt at the head of the Union."\* This was but the beginning. The total cost of four years and five months of carpet-bag rule amounted to \$106,023,337, or \$24,040,088 per year. Taxation mounted up in proportion in some places to 7 and 8 per cent. of the assessed value. Dr. Henry M. Field cites a case reported to him where it was as high as 16 per cent. The public printing had in previous years cost about \$37,000 a year. During the first two years of Warmouth's régime the New Orleans *Republican*, in which he was a large stockholder, received for public printing \$1,140,881.77.† Time and space fail to tell of the rapine, the profligacy which existed. The taxable values of New Orleans between Warmouth's advent and Kellogg's exit fell from \$146,718,790 to \$88,613,930, a net decline of \$58,104,860 in eight years, whilst real estate in the country parishes shrank in value from \$99,266,839.85 to \$47,141,696. So much for Louisiana.

In Mississippi the corruption was almost as great and the result almost as disastrous. In South Carolina it was even worse. The General Assembly which convened in Columbia in 1868 consisted of 72 whites and 85 negroes. In the House were 14 Democrats and in the Senate 7; the remaining 136 were Republicans. One of the first acts passed was anomalous. After defending the rights of negroes on railroads, in theatres, etc., it provided that if the person whose rights under the act were claimed to be violated was colored, then the universal rule of law was changed, and the burden of proof was on the defendant to establish innocence.

The public printing was also swelled expenses. The total cost of the printing in South Carolina under negro rule exceeded in one year by \$122,932.13 the cost of like work in Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Maryland together.‡

In 1860 the taxable values in the State amounted to \$490,000,000 and the tax a little less than \$400,000. In 1871 the

\* Hon. B. J. Sage, in "Noted Men on the Solid South," p. 104.

† Ib., p. 508.      ‡ Ib., p. 100.

taxable values had been reduced to \$184,000,000, and the tax increased to \$2,000,000. In nineteen counties, taken together, 93,293 acres of land were sold in one year for unpaid taxes. After four years of carpet-bag Republican rule, the debt of the State had increased from \$5,407,306 to \$18,515,033. There had been no public works of any importance, and the entire thirteen millions of dollars represented nothing but unnecessary and profligate expenditures.\*

These are simply statistics. No account has been taken of the imposition practised throughout the South during the period of negro domination ; of the vast, incredible and wanton degradation of the Southern people by the malefactors, who, with hordes of ignorant negroes just from the bonds of slavery as their instruments, trod down the once stately South at their will. No wonder that Governor Chamberlayne, Republican and carpet-bagger as he was, should have declared, as he did in writing to the New England Society : "The civilization of the Puritan and Cavalier, of the Roundhead and Huguenot, is in peril." A survey of the field and a careful consideration of the facts have convinced me that I am within the domain of truth when I say that the Southern States, with the exception perhaps of one or two of the Border States, were better off in 1868, when reconstruction went into force, than they were in 1876, when the carpet-bag governments were finally overthrown ; and that the eight years of negro domination cost the South more than the war, inclusive of the loss of values in slave property. I think if Mr. Cable and those who accept his theorem will study history, even as written only in statistics, taking no account, if they please, of the suffering and the degradation inflicted upon the white race during the period in which the South was under the dominion of the rulers selected by the negroes, they will find that there is not so much difference between the proposition which he formulates and that which the South states, when she declares that the pending question is one of race domination, on which depends the future salvation of the American people.

Twenty-seven years have rolled by since the negro was given his freedom ; more than twenty years have passed since he was given a part in the government, and was taken up to be educated. The laws were so adapted that there is not now a negro under

\* Mr. Hemphill's paper on South Carolina in "Noted Men on the Solid South," p. 102.

forty years old who has not had the opportunity to receive a public school education. The South has viewed his political course with suspicion, and in this direction has opposed him with all her resources ; but she has not been mean or niggardly towards him. On the contrary, in every place, at all times, even while she was resisting and assailing him for his political action, she has displayed towards him in the expenditures for his education a liberality which in relation to her ability has amounted to lavishness.

The Rev. Dr. A. D. Mayo, eminent alike for his learning and philanthropy, and a Northern educator, declared not long ago : “ No other people in human history have made an effort so remarkable as the people of the South in re-establishing their schools and colleges. Overwhelmed by war and bad government, they have done wonders, and with the interest and zeal now felt in public schools in the South, the hope for the future is brighter than ever.” “ Last year,” he says, speaking in 1888, “ these sixteen States paid nearly \$1,000,000 each for educational purposes, a sum greater, according to their means, than ten times the amount now paid by most of the New England States.” Virginia expended on her public schools from 1870-71 to 1890-91, according to the figures of Colonel F. G. Ruffin, Second Auditor of Virginia, taken from official sources, \$22,759,249.38. Her negro schools, including school buildings and permanent improvements, cost her \$5,380,513.65. For the year 1887-88 her negro schools cost her, by the same estimate, \$400,000, of which the negroes paid about \$60,000.

Governor Gordon, speaking of Georgia, in a recent address, said: “ When her people secured possession of the State government, they found about six thousand colored pupils in the public schools, with the school exchequer bankrupt. To-day, instead of six thousand, we have over one hundred and sixty thousand colored pupils in the public schools, with the exchequer expanding and the schools multiplying year by year.” He says further that the negroes pay one-thirtieth of the expense, and the other twenty-nine thirtieths are paid by the whites. The other Southern States have not been behind Virginia and Georgia in this matter.

Now, what has the negro accomplished in this quarter of a century ? They are barbers, and white-washers, shoe-blacks and chimney sweeps. Here and there we find a lawyer or two, unhappily

with their practice in inverse ratio to their principles, or now and then there is a doctor. But almost invariably these are men with a considerable infusion of white blood in their veins. And even these have in no single instance attained a position which in a white would be deemed above mediocrity. Fifteen years ago there were in Richmond, where I live, a number of negro tobacco manufacturers and other negro dealers. Now there are hardly any except undertakers. They have been losing ground as mechanics. Before the war, on every plantation, there were first-class carpenters, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, etc. Half the houses in Virginia were built by negro carpenters. Where are they now? In Richmond there may be a few blacksmiths and a dozen or two carpenters; but where are the others? A great strike occurred last year in one of the large iron-works of the city of Richmond. The president of the company told me afterwards that, although the places at the machines were filled later on by volunteers, and although there were many negroes employed in the works who did not strike, it never occurred to either the management or to the negroes that they could work at the machines, and not one had ever suggested it.

The question naturally arises, Have they improved? Many persons declare that they have not. My observation has led to a somewhat different conclusion. Where they have been brought into contact with the stronger race under conditions in which they derived aid, as in cities, they have in certain directions improved; where they have lacked this stimulating influence, as in sections of the country where the association has steadily diminished, they have failed to advance. In the cities, where they are in touch with the whites they are, I think, becoming more dignified, more self-respecting, more reasonable; in the country where they are left to themselves I fail to see this improvement.

This improvement, however, such as it is, does not do away with the race issue. So far from it, it rather intensifies the feeling, certainly on the part of the negro, and makes the relation more strained. Yet it is our only hope. The white race, it is reasonably certain, is not going to be ruled by the negro either North or South. That day is far off, and neither Lodge bills nor any other bills can bring it until they can reverse natural law, enact that ignorance shall be above intelligence, and exalt feebleness over strength. The history of that race is a guaranty that

this cannot be. It has been a conquering race from its first appearance, like the Scandinavians of old,

“ Firm to resolve and steadfast to endure.”

The section of it which inhabits the United States is not yet degenerate. That part of it at the South is not. It is not necessary to recall its history. Let one who has not been generally regarded as unduly biassed in favor of the South speak for it. Senator Hoar, speaking of the people of the South on the floor of the Senate, in the speech already referred to, said :

“ They have some qualities which I cannot even presume to claim in an equal degree for the people among whom I, myself, dwell. They have an aptness for command which makes the Southern gentleman, wherever he goes, not a peer only, but a prince. They have a love for home; they have the best of them, and the most of them, inherited from the great race from which they come, the sense of duty and the instinct of honor as no other people on the face of the earth. They are lovers of home. They have not the mean traits which grow up somewhere in places where money-making is the chief end of life. They have above all, and giving value to all, that supreme and superb constancy which, without regard to personal ambition and without yielding to the temptation of wealth, without getting tired and without getting diverted, can pursue a great public object, in and out, year after year and generation after generation.”

This is the race which the negro confronts. It is a race which, whatever perils have impended, has always faced them with a steadfast mind.

Professor Bryce arrives at the only reasonable conclusion : that the negro be let alone and the solution of the problem be left to the course of events. Friendship for the negro demands this. A single outbreak would settle the question. To us of the South it appears that a proper race pride is one of the strongest securities of our nation. No people can become great without it. Without it no people can remain great.

The question now remains : What is to become of the negro ? It is not likely that he will remain in his present status, if, indeed, it is possible for him to do so. Many schemes have been suggested, none of them alone answerable to the end proposed. The deportation plan does not seem practicable, at present. It is easy to suggest theories, but much more difficult to substantiate them. I hazard one based upon much reflection on the subject. It is, that the negro race in America will eventually disappear, not in a generation or a century,—it may take several

centuries. The means will be natural. Certain portions of the Southern States will for a while, perhaps, be almost given up to him; but in time he will be crowded out even there. Africa may take a part; Mexico and South America a part; the rest will, as the country fills up, as life grows harder and competition fiercer, become diffused and will disappear, a portion by absorption into the stronger race, the residue by perishing under conditions of life unsuited to him.

Meantime he is here, and something must be done. In the first place let us have all the light that can be thrown on the subject. Form an organization to consider and deal with the subject, not in the spirit of narrowness or temper, but in a spirit of philosophic deliberation, such as becomes a great people discussing a great question which concerns not only their present, but their future position among the nations. We shall then get at the right of the matter.

Let us do our utmost to eliminate from the question the complication of its political features. Get politics out of it, and the problem will be more than half solved. Senator Hampton stated not long ago in a paper contributed by him, I think, to this REVIEW, that, to get the negro out of politics, he would gladly give up the representation based on his vote. Could anything throw a stronger light on the apprehension with which the negro in politics is regarded at the South?

There never was any question more befogged with demagogism than that of manhood suffrage. Let us apply ourselves to the securing some more reasonable and better basis for the suffrage. Let us establish such a proper qualification as a condition to the possession of the elective franchise as shall leave the ballot only to those who have intelligence enough to use it as an instrument to secure good government rather than to destroy it. In taking this step we have to plant ourselves on a broader principle than that of a race qualification. It is not merely the negro, it is ignorance and venality which we want to disfranchise. If we can disfranchise these we need not fear the voter, whatever the color. At present it is not the negro who is disfranchised, but the white. We dare not divide.

Having limited him in a franchise which he has not in a generation learned to use, continue to teach him. It is from the educated negro, that is, the negro who is more enlightened than

the general body of his race, that order must come. The ignorance, venality, and superstition of the average negro are dangerous to us. Education will divide them and will uplift them. They may learn in time that if they wish to rise they must look to the essential qualities of good citizenship. In this way alone can the race or any part of the race look for ultimate salvation.

It has appeared to some that the South has not done its full duty by the negro. Perfection is, without doubt, a standard above humanity ; but, at least, we of the South can say that we have done much for him; if we have not admitted him to social equality, it has been under an instinct stronger than reason, and in obedience to a law higher than is on the statute books : the law of self-preservation. Slavery, whatever its demerits, was not in its time the unmitigated evil it is fancied to have been. Its time has passed. No power could compel the South to have it back. But to the negro it was salvation. It found him a savage and in two hundred years gave seven million of his race a civilization, the only civilization it has had since the dawn of history.

We have educated him ; we have aided him ; we have sustained him in all right directions. We are ready to continue our aid ; but we will not be dominated by him. When we shall be, it is our settled conviction that we shall deserve the degradation into which we shall have sunk.

THOMAS NELSON PAGE.